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Parent Leadership Toolkit: Tools for Effective Advocacy

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Overview

As advocates, leaders, and community members, parents are capable of providing unique grassroots educational leadership in our schools. We cannot create high-quality schools without the partnership of parents. Empowering the voices of parents in our education system is critical to the success of our students.

Creating and establishing parent organizations are a useful and effective way to organize parent voices and amplify their power in the educational landscape. Effective advocacy involves identifying the purpose and objectives of the work in the communities, understanding the issues and opinions behind the causes, investing in the power of the advocates, and strategically leveraging available tools and skills to maximum utility.

This toolkit provides an outline of how to create and establish a parent organization with the right structure, leadership, and procedures for your school through the following steps:

1. Knowing the Issues
2. Understanding the Terms
3. Getting Started
4. Connecting Advocacy to Action, Goal/Agenda Setting, Establishing Mission & Vision
5. Nuts and Bolts – Establishing Procedures and Operations
6. Funding and Budgeting
7. Building Relationships and Partnerships, Establishing Trust, and Fostering Effective Communication
8. Diversity and Recruitment

Step 7: Building Relationships and Partnerships

Establishing Trust and Fostering Effective Communication

“A community convening (or conversation) is a first step in building relationships and rebuilding trust. [These] dialogues [must]...be part of a sustained community effort” or strategies.

Source:

<https://citiesspeak.org/2016/08/10/advancing-racial-equity-community-conversations-on-race-justice-and-equality/>

Discover and Define Ideal Outcomes

Discover your ideal outcomes by finishing the following four sentences:

- 1) Coming into this conversation, we see the following needs and challenges...
- 2) Inside this conversation we want people to engage with each other in these ways...
- 3) At the end of this conversation, we want these things to be clear...
- 4) Following this conversation, we want these things to happen...

How to Engage the Community to Understand

Engage the community to understand:

- People's aspirations for the community.
- People's concerns.
- How people think and talk about a given issue in relation to the community.
- The changes needed to reach our aspirations for the community.
- What people believe we can do, and who they'd trust to take action.

Community Conversation themes help inform how you:

- Engage the community: Inviting new people opens the door to new relationships.
- Find new partners: Sharing public knowledge creates coalition opportunities.
- Develop strategies: Work on the issue AND build capacity to work together.
- Mobilize resources: Create natural pathways for people to contribute.

Pathways for Effective Communication

Effective Communication 101:

Fostering an Effective Relationship With Your Child's School

It's A Partnership

As a starting point, always consider your relationship with your child's school, a partnership. This will allow you to foster a relationship with your child's teacher that will continue to be nurtured throughout the school year.

Create a Plan of Action for Communication

Make sure to share your expectations for communication with your child's teacher. Remember have patience – teachers and school administrators can have a variety of things on their agenda daily, but should always respond to your requests for communication.

Always Follow Up

Calling multiple times in a day is not the best strategy for communication but following up the next day, or even in two days, after making a request to communicate with your child's teacher, or school administrator, would be valuable. Make sure to ask when you can expect for your message to be returned.

Effective Communication 101: When Conflict Arises

Clearly Identify the Problem or Concern

Organizing yourself and being prepared will ensure that you are able to clearly share your concerns.

Understand the Rules

Take time to understand what the school rules and/or expectations are for your child. Also, be clear on the expectations that school has for parents. If those expectations do not sound appropriate do not be afraid to ask questions and offer suggestions.

Listen

Remember to ACTIVELY listen to what other perspectives might be offered.

Ask Questions

Do not be afraid to ask questions – never leave confused, always ask for clarity.

Find Common Ground

There is always room for compromise. Remember the good in reaching a solution that is in the best interest of your child.

Create A Plan of Action

If there is an issue that needs to be more formally addressed, talk with the teacher, or other school personnel about developing a plan to specifically address the issue. Clearly outline each person's responsibilities and ways to follow up.

Gather Information, Organize Yourself, Be Prepared

Talk with your child to get their perspective. Take some time to organize your thoughts prior to communicating with your child's teacher or school – preparing the questions you have for the teacher or school in advance might be a useful exercise. Taking a moment to organize yourself will ensure that you do not forget to raise important points or questions.

Suggestions Are Welcome

In addition to questions, do not be afraid to offer suggestions or options that you feel are in the best interest of your child.

Have Patience

Solutions might not be immediate but having clarity of the timeline for solutions and getting answers to your questions is appropriate.

Remove Emotions, Share Facts

Talking to your child's school about an issue can elicit a host of emotions. Take a moment to breathe before talking to the school – explain your concerns clearly and as calmly as possible. This will ensure that you have collected your thoughts.



Please visit our website for more useful resources and tip sheets. If you want one-on-one assistance, please feel free to call our office, we look forward to working with you!

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Effective Communication 101: General Tips to Know

Take Time To Inform:

Make sure that you clearly, and promptly, inform your child's teacher, and other appropriate school personnel, of any issues your child is dealing with or any concerns that you might have – especially if the issue at hand might impact your child's performance or behavior.

Find Ways To Get Involved:

Parent involvement is not only limited to parent organizations, ask about other opportunities to get engaged at your child's school. Actively engaging at your child's school also provides avenues for communication with not only your child's teacher but also other relevant school personnel. Involvement can also foster positive relationships with other parents and uncover essential information that would be valuable for your child's success.

Ask For Help:

There are times when you need help. It might be help that you need from your child's teacher or school, but also on occasion you might need assistance that the school may not have the resources or capacity to provide. Nurturing relationships with your child's teacher, other parents, or even other individuals might lead you to the organization, agency, or resource that can give you the exact assistance that you, or your child, need.

Need help getting started? Consider trying a few of these sentence starters to engage your child's teacher or school:

- "I'm concerned about my child's..."
- "Help me understand..."
- "Have you considered..."
- "I've noticed..."
- "Her IEP provides her with _____. How does that look in the classroom?"
- "It seems as if he has a harder time doing ____ when _____."

These sentence starters were informed and adapted from www.understood.org. Please visit our website for more useful resources and tip sheets. If you want one-on-one assistance, please feel free to call our office, we look forward to working with you!



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Building Relationships and Partnerships: Resources

Collaboration between and amongst parents, teachers, and school members will catapult organizations from functional to effective.

[Keys to Success in Family-School Partnership](#)

[Nine Truths to Parent Involvement](#)

[Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#)